

# THE IRONWORKER

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# IRONWORKERS

MAKE A DIFFERENCE AS

# ELECTED OFFICIALS

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## SHOP DEPARTMENT REPORT

John Bielak



### McGregor Industries celebrates 100 years of high-quality metal products

**A** hundred years and four generations into its history, Dunmore, Pennsylvania-based metal fabrication firm McGregor Industries, Inc. remains a true testament to American and union-made ingenuity.

The family-owned company, founded 100 years ago in Scranton, continues to thrive today due to its constant market adjustments and innovations, and its loyal, hardworking staff, which includes union workers from Local 521 (Scranton, Penn.).

“Our employees are so skilled. They know the business. And they’re incredibly committed to doing a good job,” said Grace McGregor Kramer, the company’s fourth-generation McGregor representative and its director of strategy and operations.

For more than a decade, McGregor has been among the biggest producers of high-rise stair towers in the nation. That innovation came out of the uncertainty of the Great Recession of 2008, when Bob McGregor, current president and third

generation family member, was looking for a way to keep the shop workers busy during the economic downturn.

Luckily, there was a huge demand for stair towers in the Philadelphia market, and Bob eventually realized the company could develop its own proprietary stair product. Out of that came three variations on the McGregor stair tower: EasyStep, which provides the benefits of a traditional steel step and requires no field pouring; the heavy-duty PermaStep, which is ideal for heavy-traffic areas; and TopTread, which with its non-slip surface and economical price point is the most popular of the three.

“Thinking about a new product and making a new product are two different things,” reflected Bob. “We may have had the initial idea, but our



shop stepped up to the plate and figured out how to make them.”

Among other big Philly projects, McGregor recently supplied the stairs for the 50-story W Hotel—Element Tower, and is currently working on two other 50-story buildings, the Laurel and 311 Board Street.

The stair towers are constructed in the sprawling McGregor shop by the talented group of union layout men, fitters, welders, drivers, painters and helpers, many of whom are multigenerational company employees. They collaborate with company draftsmen to ensure a cutting-edge and efficient product—the machines are all computerized, allowing for complete precision in cutting and assembly. Once assembled, the stair towers are delivered



to urban jobsites in bundles, and are erected by McGregor using all union ironworkers.

Last year, employees took on the huge task of completely reconfiguring the shop's collection of heavy machinery in order to meet the increasing demands of the stair tower operation.

“It was a challenge. We had to think, ‘Well, if we move this machine, how's it going to affect this machine over here?’ The changeover took about 10 days altogether. But it's a much more efficient operation now,” said shop foreman John Wallo, a 34-year McGregor employee who worked as a helper, fitter and layout man before being promoted to his current position.

“It just made the set-up so much more efficient,” Grace said. “The 521 shop guys really embraced the entire project, and they are a huge reason that it all worked. It's just part of the ongoing evolution of the company continually moving forward.”

Besides Philly, the company has made inroads in the Boston market. McGregor has landed several big jobs, including the \$4 million contract to install the stair towers at the Encore Boston Harbor casino which, with more than 4,000 total workers, is among the largest construction projects in Massachusetts history. In addition, it's installing the stairs for MIT's massive, 10-building Kendall Square project.

As McGregor looks ahead to the future, McGregor hopes to continue to expand to other markets, creating more ironworker hours in the process.

“This is a truly collaborative process of unions working together with a company for their mutual success,” said Bob McGregor.

